

GURDJIEFF'S MOVEMENTS AND SACRED DANCES¹

Gurdjieff's Movements and sacred dances were an essential component of his teaching on human transformation and development. (1) To many of his students they represent "the Work's immaculate heart – a spiritual legacy of incalculable significance." (2)

Gurdjieff spent much of his life studying and mastering the art of sacred dance, and in his later years often described himself as a "teacher of dancing." He believed that certain traditional dances were a form of sacred art whose purpose was to preserve and transmit esoteric knowledge:

Gurdjieff held that millennia ago Sacred Dance was essentially a mode of communication, a universal language with its own grammar, vocabulary and semantic usage. Each dance was a book, each sequence or rhythm a phrase, each gesture or posture a word. (3)

Although Gurdjieff created many of the Movements himself, the majority of the more than 200 Movement exercises originated from sacred dances and religious ceremonies preserved in temples and monasteries that Gurdjieff visited during his extensive travels in Central Asia and elsewhere:

The *dances and movements* which Gurdjieff taught were partially a result of his research in the monasteries and schools of Asia, and are of a nature that seems unique in the modern Western world. In certain respects, they are comparable to sacred dances in traditional religious systems (for example, the 'Cham dances of Tibetan Buddhism or the dervish dances of the Sufis). Like them, the Gurdjieff Movements are based on the view that a series of specific postures, gestures, and movements, supported by an intentional use of melody and rhythm and an essential element of right individual effort, can help to evoke an inner condition which is closer to a more conscious existence, or a state of unity, which can allow an opening to the conscious energy of the Self. (4)

Gurdjieff first taught rhythmic exercises and dervish dances to his students in 1918, after which they assumed a major role in his teaching program. Gurdjieff worked with Thomas de Hartmann to compose music to accompany the exercises and trained a number of promising students to teach the dances to beginners. Public demonstrations of the Movements and sacred dances were subsequently performed in a number of cities, including Paris and New York.

Following his serious automobile accident in July 1924, Gurdjieff shifted his focus to writing and entrusted the teaching of the Movements to senior pupils. By the Second World War, Gurdjieff resumed Movements classes in Paris and from then on energetically created new exercises until a month before his death in 1949. Students have attested to his remarkable ability as a teacher of dance, able to convey the significance of the

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movements and their relationship to the participant's state of consciousness "more by his presence and the influence it exerted than by explanations." (5)

The Movements demand great effort and sustained attention, as participants are required to combine complicated arm, leg and head movements with mental exercises, all the while maintaining a sense of presence and awareness. On one level they are a means to reveal to students the power of conditioned habits, postures and gestures. On another level they enable students to access a higher level of energy that facilitates the spiritual search: "The farthest limits of one's endurance are reached through the combination of non-natural and non-habitual movements, and by performing them a new quality of sensing is obtained, a new quality of concentration and attention and a new direction of the mind." (6)

Following Gurdjieff's death, senior pupils continued to teach the Movements in exactly the same way that he had instructed them, stressing "the need for exactitude and a special quality of feeling, without which the Movements cannot provide the help for which they were brought." (7) Today, the Movements remain an essential feature of the Work and have gained widespread attention in spiritual circles and curious interest in the larger community.

Significance of Sacred Dance

For countless centuries dance has played a significant role in the community life of cultures around the world. The yearly cycle of the seasons was celebrated in planting and harvest dances, and some dances even embodied recipes in their patterns and rhythms. Tasks such as weaving carpets, combing wool and spinning thread were often performed as rhythmic movement to the accompaniment of music.

During his travels, Gurdjieff familiarized himself with folk dances and ceremonies from a wide variety of cultures. Many of these dances were later incorporated into the Movement exercises he taught his students. Wim Van Dullemen: "All ancient cultures relate dance to manifestations of God, Creation and its Mysteries. In those cultures, dances invariably accompany and assist men and women in their critical steps towards physical and psychological growth. Movements represent the result of an ultimate effort by Gurdjieff to re-install in the life of people – especially those living in Western cultures – the importance of dance and physical exercises in the process of self-development. He introduced and implanted in our culture a new liturgy, a new ritual to stimulate and assist transformation of individual people and of society as a whole." (8) But Gurdjieff also encountered a more profound kind of dance in the temples and monasteries of the East. (9) He was astounded by the precision of movement and purity of feeling of the dancers and the quality of knowledge they transmitted. These dances were developed and performed by esoteric schools as a non-verbal language which encoded and transmitted information about cosmic laws and human spiritual development:

This language is mathematical, according to exact measure. Every movement has its appointed place, its duration and weight. The combinations and sequences are mathematically calculated. Postures and attitudes are arranged to produce definite, predetermined emotions. In these, he who is watching them may also participate – he may read them as a script, in which the higher emotions and higher mind can take part. (10)

In the scenario to his ballet *The Struggle of the Magicians*, Gurdjieff explains the purpose of sacred dances in the context of a school of inner development:

These ‘sacred dances’ are considered to be one of the principal subjects of study in all esoteric schools of the East, both in ancient times and at the present day. The movements of which these dances consist have a double purpose; they express and contain a certain knowledge and, at the same time, they serve as a method of attaining a harmonious state of being. Combinations of these movements express different sensations, producing varying degrees of concentration of thought, create necessary efforts in different functions and show the possible limits of individual force. (11)

In talks with his students, Gurdjieff provided an interesting analogy to describe the deeper meaning of certain sacred dances. Imagine a mechanism, he said, in which the movements of the planets were visually represented by spheres of different sizes placed at different distances from a central sphere representing the Sun. When the mechanism is set in motion, the spheres begin to rotate and move along prescribed paths, reproducing in visual form the laws which govern the movements of the planets. In a similar manner, sacred dances visually reproduce certain cosmic laws through the carefully defined movements and combinations performed by the dancers.

In traditional spiritual teachings, sacred dances have other functions in addition to encoding and transmitting esoteric knowledge, including:

- exercising the body, mind and emotions in unfamiliar ways
- developing the power of attention and concentration and the capacity for will and patience
- producing various psychological states corresponding to particular postures
- acting as a precise means of self-study and self-knowledge
- giving an organic experience of the essential aim of authentic inner work – self-remembering
- preparing students for heightened perception and higher states of consciousness
- accessing, assimilating and transmitting a subtle refined spiritual energy
- connecting to and harmonizing with the ‘mystical current.’

Gurdjieff believed that the ordinary person’s postures and movements, as well as their thoughts and feelings, were habitual and conditioned, not conscious (12). The fact that so much of our behaviour is involuntary means that achieving real change of being is very difficult. By requiring the participants to make non-habitual postures and movements,

sacred dances can establish a new, more harmonious relationship between the body, mind and feelings. This integration creates conditions in which the student can access higher energies for the purpose of spiritual development.

For Gurdjieff, the Movements and sacred dances he taught his students were both a means of self-study and a catalyst for inner growth:

You have seen our movements and dances. But all you saw was the outer form – beauty and technique. But I do not like the external side you see. For me, art is a means for harmonious development . . . Ordinary gymnastics and dances are mechanical. If our aim is a harmonious development of man, then for us dances and movements are a means of combining the mind and the feeling with movements of the body and manifesting them together. In all things, we have the aim to develop something which cannot be developed directly or mechanically – which interprets the whole man: mind, body and feeling. The second purpose of dances is study. Certain movements carry a proof in them, a definite knowledge, or religious and philosophical ideas. In some of them one can even read a recipe for cooking some dish . . . Thus movements have two aims: study and development. (13)

Development and Presentation of the Movements

Although Gurdjieff referred to sacred dances as early as 1914 in the prospectus for his ballet *The Struggle of the Magicians*, he did not begin teaching rhythmic exercises and dervish dances to his pupils until 1918 in Essentuki.

A year later, in Tiflis, he began rehearsals for the staging of *The Struggle of the Magicians* by teaching his students a number of Eastern ethnic dances accompanied by music improvised by Thomas de Hartmann. As a means of self-study, Gurdjieff required his dancers to make both the beautiful movements of the followers of the White Magician and the ugly, deformed movements of the followers of the Black Magician.

Concurrently, Gurdjieff formed a women's class composed of the most gifted dancers and prepared them as instructors to teach the Movement exercises to new pupils. He arranged for public performances of the Movements and sacred dances in Tbilisi in 1919 with the carefully prepared women's group forming the nucleus of his dance troupe. The public performances served many objectives for Gurdjieff: "His chief purpose was evidently to plunge participants into intense and formative experiences, his secondary aims being to 'nourish the times' and attract suitable pupils." (14)

When Gurdjieff established the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Constantinople in 1920, the Movements became central to the teaching program there. With the re-establishment of the Institute in France in 1922, further intensive Movements work was undertaken. Gurdjieff's method of creating new exercises and dance patterns was characterized by an inspired but bewildering spontaneous process:

Gurdjieff would teach the postures and gestures of the exercises partly by doing them himself; or, if they were complicated, involving different movements by different rows or positions, he would walk round and place each pupil in the desired posture. There would be vehement arguments. The stage became a chaos of dispute, gesticulation and shouting as the pupils tried to work out the sequence required. Suddenly, Gurdjieff would give a peremptory shout and there would be dead silence. A few words of explanation, and de Hartmann would play the theme, which by then he had worked into a rich harmony. Sometimes the result was spectacular: a beautiful ensemble never seen before would appear as if by magic. At other times, the task was too difficult and the exercise broke down, to be worked over for hours during the succeeding days. (15)

Gurdjieff decided to prepare his pupils for a much more extensive program of Movements which would be publicly performed. On December 16, 1923 at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in Paris, a curious audience witnessed the premiere. (16) Reviews were decidedly mixed. Most theatre critics and journalists viewed the dances as mere exotic entertainment devoid of aesthetic appeal. Others disparaged the highly disciplined structure of the dances and the unsmiling faces of the performers. But many found the presentation startlingly beautiful and strangely moving. Gurdjieff and his troupe travelled to America in 1924 and gave public performances in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago to generally appreciative audiences.

Following his automobile accident in 1924, Gurdjieff ceased teaching the Movements and devoted the majority of his time and energy to writing. The Movements classes continued, however, sustained by senior pupils like Jeanne de Salzmann, Rosemary Nott and Jessmin Howarth. The Movements were regularly practised in the New York groups led by A.R. Orage, and later in the 1930s by Ouspensky's English groups and the Paris group of Jeanne de Salzmann. Gurdjieff did not resume teaching the Movements until 1939, and from that time continued to create new exercises until a few weeks before his death in October 1949. Even in the last years of his life, Gurdjieff impressed his students as an inspired teacher:

[We] were struck by his extraordinary sense of rhythm and precision in movement and by his suppleness and inventiveness. It was astonishing to discover so great a knowledge of this art in someone whose teaching was already so vast. Everyone had the feeling that they were in the presence of something unique coming from very far away and from very high: an ancient knowledge of the laws of the universe, of the laws governing movements and postures, and of the laws relating to the harmony of the body and to feelings of a higher order. Each gesture, each tempo, had to be executed with great precision. Gurdjieff often used the expression "to do exactly." When this "to do exactly" was there each posture resonated in us like the precise echo of something much higher. Forces long forgotten within sprang forth. (17)

During the final two years of his life, Gurdjieff worked tirelessly to create literally hundreds of new Movement exercises: “He created scores of exercises, combinations and sequences, mathematically calculated, designed to help sustain attention and to understand what we now call ‘sensation’; to provide shocks and new impressions, and to induce intentionally certain feelings and more ‘collected’ states.” (18) Gurdjieff was constantly experimenting and observing the effect of the Movements on his students, often to their surprise: “Sometimes, having given us a fascinating new Movement that we finally learnt and really did well, exactly as he had instructed, he would nevertheless stop us and say gravely: ‘No! Never again!’” (19) And when an especially difficult Movement was properly executed he would call out “Bravo! Bravo!”

Gurdjieff placed great importance on a certain series of Movements he created with his French and American pupils. These completed Movements consist of 39 exercises worked out in Paris (called “The Thirty-nine”) and an additional seven exercises developed in New York (the “American series”). Each Movement was usually referred to by a number or a descriptive name such as “Multiplication No. Five.” Ultimately, Gurdjieff considered only 46 of the Movements to be complete and fixed, with no further changes or adjustments required. When he was satisfied with a given Movement he would announce to the class: “This now you may continue to work with.” (20)

If we compare the “39” with Gurdjieff’s earlier Movements, we basically see the same components: strong dervish dances, beautiful and quiet women’s, powerful geometrical patterned Movements, as well as sacred prayer rituals. However, the ancient religious and ethnological components are remarkably reduced, while abstract gestures and positions, performed in mathematical displacements, now prevail. It is as if during the fifteen year time span since his first efforts, Gurdjieff had digested his earlier impressions and reflected upon them to reappear with an even more personal style, in which mathematical and geometrical crystallizations were now dominant. The drama of the human condition, so poignantly captured in a number of old Movements, seems to have given way to a more abstract construction, but one that gives immediate and plentiful opportunity for work on oneself and work for the class as a whole. The later Movements were even more difficult to perform than the earlier ones and demanded a huge effort from a class in their demands on precision, quickness, discipline and sustained attention for their entire duration. The “39” Movements have been called Gurdjieff’s Magnum opus, and many have felt that in this series he summarized his whole teaching in this final and most powerful message to humankind. (21)

Following his death, senior students under the direction of Jeanne de Salzmann took responsibility for teaching the Movements to future generations of students of the Work. They took great care to transmit the Movements exactly as they had been taught without embellishment or distortion. Some of the original Movements have disappeared because Gurdjieff did not allow students to transcribe them. (22) The preservation of the remaining exercises is a testament to the initiative and power of recollection of his successors. In the 1950s, wanting to create a permanent visual record of the Movements, Jeanne de Salzmann directed ten archival films. These films are not available for viewing

by the public. The only publicly released footage of the Movements is contained in the final ten minutes of Peter Brook's film *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, released in the United States in 1979.

Nature of the Movements

In program notes for the public performances of the Movements, Gurdjieff identified the ethnic, ritual and temple dances as having a variety of origins, including Turkestan, Afghanistan, Kafiristan, Chitral, Transcaspia, Turkey and Tibet. However, there is no independent verification of his attributions of these structured dances by any contemporary Central Asian ethnologist or anthropologist. It is possible that these dances are adaptations of dances Gurdjieff had witnessed in his travels. Scholars and pupils of Gurdjieff have attempted to place the diverse collection of Movements into a series of categories as follows:

- The 'Obligatories,' a series of six preliminary exercises in attention and coordination which are learned by all students before progressing to more complex exercises
- Work movements and rhythms, characterized by action and precision, which often reflect a specific occupation (e.g. "The Shoe-Maker")
- Dervish dances and exercises, usually performed by men and distinguished by dynamic rhythms and an intensity that is consciously controlled
- Women's dances in which the soft, gentle movements of the dancers embody the feminine principle and suggest service to a higher truth
- Sacred Eastern dances, often of ancient origin, typified by a slow tempo and reverent atmosphere
- Ritual prayer movements or 'prayer in motion,' whose beautiful choreography suggests a deeper significance and symbology. In some cases, spoken word is added, including phrases like "Lord Have Mercy"
- Movements, known as "Multiplications," based on Gurdjieff's cosmological laws of Three and Seven which are encapsulated by the enneagram. The dancers move along mathematically predetermined paths in accordance with the laws being represented

Each of the Movements is accompanied by specially composed music usually played on piano. (23) The music plays a critical role in supporting the Movements, both in their physical expression and their ability to effect inner transformation in the dancers. The

quality of the musical structure, rhythm, melody and harmony awakens an inner response in the dancers which touches their inner essence or being:

Q: How does this music act on the dancers?

A: Through the harmonies – but above all, through the composition of the music. Music can also belong to different orders of laws. Its structure, its harmonies, its melody, and its rhythm must accompany not only the outward movements but also the inner impulses which develop progressively in the course of the exercise. If the quality of vibration is right, it will awaken its counterpart in the dancers; it will not carry them away nor distract them. It constantly brings them back to themselves and to their need to be open. (24)

The Movements created an indelible impression on many viewers seeing them for the first time. (25) Yet, students of the Work agree that it is virtually impossible to convey the nature of the Movements to an outsider. A surprising degree of effort is required to perform the Movements correctly, which must be executed exactly as taught with a high degree of mental attention, relaxed presence and precision of movement:

Each Movement's external form is 'mathematically' predetermined from beginning to end . . . Every posture, gesture, rhythm, has its appointed place, duration and weight. Reliance on habit, reflex functioning, and symmetry is minimal; the participant's arms, legs and head must often conform to independent contrapuntal rhythms; interior exercises in sensation and counting in canon may be added, and silent or spoken prayer. These diverse demands are reconcilable only by the dancer's mobilized attention equipoised among intellect, feeling and body. (26)

In learning the Movements, students must do a great deal of preparatory work with exercises of increasing difficulty – disassociated or unnatural movements; complicated movement sequences – developed to strengthen the power of attention and concentration. (27) Once students have mobilized sufficient attention to perform the correct postures and sequence of gestures and movements, they are challenged to make a second effort of attention by doing inner exercises of counting or sensing:

At the very beginning of the practice of the preliminary exercises the effort of the attention to memorize different postures seems to be solely formal and to depend mainly upon physical aptitude. But as the exercises become progressively more and more complex, the difficulty of facing the growing demand for coordination of different speeds, different tempos, and different rhythms associated with complicated displacements and canons, calls for a new attentiveness never experienced before. (28)

The final requirement of attention is to sense one's presence or being, the sensation of oneself as a whole. The Movements have their full effect only when all three degrees of

attention are engaged, which gives rise to a higher spiritual energy that reveals another level of being:

At first the only problem that arises in working on the movements is the establishment of the correct posture and the succession of gestures and displacements that go with it. At this stage, the attention must be focused on the parts of the body that have to perform the various movements, either simultaneously or in rapid succession. This is difficult enough, but soon another effort is needed – the turning of the most refined quality of attention one can achieve towards the sensation of oneself as a whole. For a long time one's approach to this additional demand cannot but be very clumsy. Nevertheless, the double effort of attention does sometimes appear, bringing with it a fleeting taste of liberty which, however short its duration, is so unforgettable that it is eagerly sought for again. Once this kind of work begins to be possible, the movements are no longer controlled by reference to a mental image alone – they depend on the acute sensation of oneself that springs from this more active level of attention. One can say now that the movement is made through and not by me. This changes everything. (29)

When properly performed within a group ensemble, the Movements take on new meaning and significance. Each dancer is a single cog in a complex machine, moving within a row or block of dancers, interchanging positions with mathematical precision in a unified flow of movement. The Movements which derive their meaning from their specific form and pattern, such as the enneagram flow of energy, then take on the symbolism of hieroglyphs or pictograms, physical codifications of knowledge.

Effects of the Movements

In his practical teachings Gurdjieff treated the study of his ideas and the practice of the Movements as complementary. Many students of the Work have reported that their experience of the Movements was invaluable in helping them understand aspects of the Work beyond a purely theoretical perspective. But pupils are unanimous that performing the Movements properly is remarkably demanding, and often frustrating and exhausting. (30) The dancers are pushed to the limits of their endurance as they struggle to master the sequence of postures while maintaining attention and presence. In the words of Thomas de Hartmann: "I was like an old, rusted, revolving machine, with no attention for the transition from one pose to the next." (31)

Students are instructed to use the Movements as a means to study themselves and observe their habits. The unusual postures and movements challenge their habitual patterns of physical expression, allowing pupils to acquire insight into the limitations of their bodies as a result of habit and conditioning. They show the degree to which the body is an obstacle to the spiritual search through its inertia, tensions and automatism. The difficulties the student experiences in the Movements is a mirror of the experiences of

everyday life: “It is not only when faced with the demands of the exercises that he is heavy, clumsy, incapable of giving himself fully – that is how he lives all the time. He discovers his real situation.” (32)

The Movements provide a method for students to experience directly two co-existing realities within themselves: “One pole corresponds to one’s real possibility – the awakening of consciousness, the development of being, presence to oneself. The other pole corresponds to the way we actually live, enslaved by our own automatism, our passivity, our sleep.” (33) In this sense the Movements are a means of self-observation and self-study:

We realize in Movements that we rarely awaken to our own life – inner and outer. We see that we always react in a habitual and conditioned way; we become aware that our three main centres, head, body, feelings rarely work together or in harmony; we begin to try to move always intentionally, not mechanically. And we discover in ourselves many hitherto unexpected possibilities; we find that one can collect one’s attention, that one can be ‘awake’ at times and have an overall sensation of oneself. That quietness of mind, an awareness of body and an interest of feeling can be brought together and that this results in a more complete state of attentiveness in which the life force is freed and one is sensitive and open to higher influences. Thus, one has a taste of how life could be lived differently. (34)

When viewed from this perspective, the Movements are understood as a means not an end – it is not how well the Movements are technically executed, but rather “the inner state of attentiveness and impartial watching that is essential.” (35)

One of Gurdjieff’s aims in teaching the Movements was to help students achieve balance and integration between body, mind and feelings. Each of the three centres has its own intelligence, attention and role to play in the proper execution of the Movements, and when they harmonize and support each other a special state of unitary attention appears. (36) Students have reported that after practising the Movements for many years they sometimes experience a transformative state where body, mind and feelings are unified and purified:

The Movements show us the profound effect that efforts can have when they are made under conditions created on the basis of precise knowledge. When seemingly insurmountable difficulties are overcome, the inner state of being changes. Fatigue and other obstacles vanish . . . Feeling becomes more confident, thought clearer, the body lighter. And when the experience is over, the body retains a trace of it. It is no longer quite the same. It has been baptized, initiated. It is in a state of balanced well-being. (37)

The effort to perform the Movements correctly leads to the development of a finer, more refined quality of attention in which the mechanical flow of associations ceases. When inner attention is maintained there is a free flow of energy through the body, so that the Movements can be performed with a sense of ease and freedom. New currents of

energy, previously inaccessible, can be received and transformed by the dancer. Those who have worked with the Movements for an extended period of time sometimes report being aware of a finer, higher quality of spiritual energy which reflect an experience which is beyond words or verbal formulation. (38)

Contact with a finer spiritual energy develops a special sensitivity of consciousness and a state of awakened presence. At this point the Movements become truly sacred, both in their inner content and their outer manifestation. (39) They have fulfilled their function as embodiments of esoteric knowledge and conductors of spiritual energy.

The Movements Today

Spiritual exercises are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Like all techniques they can be useful when correctly applied at appropriate times in the context of a comprehensive teaching. Although the Movements played a major role in Gurdjieff's teaching, they were not intended to be practised continuously year after year. They were primarily directed toward producing a particular result or change in the pupil. Like other spiritual exercises they were meant to be carried out for a certain time until their purpose had been accomplished, and then changed or abandoned.

The Movements can become a spectacle with their great beauty and compelling effect on onlookers. But the beauty of the dances is secondary and, in fact, not all of the movements are beautiful or harmonious. (40) Nor are the Movements designed to promote physical fitness, physiological healing or altered states of consciousness. They are a way of understanding and experimenting with the oral and written knowledge Gurdjieff transmitted to his pupils. When deprived of this fundamental connection with Gurdjieff's essential ideas, the Movements lose much of their meaning.

Gurdjieff's successors endeavoured to teach the Movements in exactly the way they were transmitted by Gurdjieff. However, as with many teaching enterprises, distortions, simplifications and wrong emphases have entered the equation in the form of unprepared instructors, inaccurate instructions, pointless repetitions of exercises and an insistence on memory by rote or performing feats of endurance. Some senior teachers of the Movements have sounded a dire warning: "We have seen more and more misconceptions develop around the Movements, their use, validity, precise content, even their comparative authenticity considering the constant influx of ersatz imitations, and amateur 'preparatory exercises'." (41)

Following Gurdjieff's death in 1949, some of his students such as John Bennett made "additions" and "improvements" to the original set of Movements, including the recitation of Islamic prayers and instructing dancers to "feel" specific emotions in certain physical postures. Others, like Olgivanna Wright, tried to "develop" and add "choreography" to the Movements in ill-advised public performances in the United States in the 1950s. Of greater concern is the proliferation of self-appointed, independent Movements

teachers who openly advertise classes and workshops to anyone willing to pay an often hefty fee regardless of their preparation and understanding of the purpose of the Movements. The problem is compounded when these so-called “teachers” combine the Movements with an indiscriminate mixture of other spiritual teachings and practices.

Today, the Movements are practised throughout the world by groups and organizations with no formal connection to the Work. Unauthorized videos of the Movements performed by these groups are routinely sold over the Internet or screened at workshops, gatherings and retreats. The result is usually harmless but spiritually unproductive. However, in some cases there are serious consequences as participants are unable to properly integrate their experiences, as they lack the support of teachers who understand the purpose and dynamics of the Movements.

Wim Van Dullemen has been involved in Movements classes in both Europe and America for many decades, principally as a pianist accompanying the Movements. He presents some of the essential criteria for evaluating the quality and authenticity of groups teaching the Movements:

Movements can only be learned in an authentic line of transmission. Study of them will take years of determined effort. Not only in Movements, but in Gurdjieff’s teaching as a whole. Any learning process has stages. It requires the acquisition of new knowledge, the absorption and digestion of this material, and finally, the application in practice of what has been learned in theory. In learning Movements these stages add up to a minimum of seven years. It only makes sense to study with a teacher who knows the Movements, is willing to give the whole Movement and not just in fragments, and is able to stimulate the class in its inner work. A transmission is authentic when founded by a personal pupil of Gurdjieff. These pupils often co-operated with one another, at least in the years immediately after Gurdjieff’s death, and amidst the labyrinth formed by these lines, the Institut Gurdjieff in Paris and the related Foundations stand out because of their historical bonds, their competence, the size of their organization, and because all were led by their founder, Mme. Jeanne de Salzmann. Several other lines independent from the above mentioned organizations and smaller in size, can also be qualified as authentic because they too were founded or guided by direct pupils of Gurdjieff who themselves stood in the Movements classes. From this last group, the original Ouspensky and Bennett lines seem the most important, insofar as comparative study of Movements transmission is concerned. They are by no means the only ones . . . To compare these aforementioned lineages, the following criteria seem relevant:

- whether or not the Movements are presented in conjunction with the study of Gurdjieff’s teaching as a whole.
 - the number and type of Movements being transmitted.
 - the relation between their form and content.
 - to whom they are taught.
 - whether whole Movements, or only fragments of Movements are presented.
- Application of these criteria will quickly bring the strengths and weaknesses

of the different lines of transmission to the surface. Both the Foundation and the Ouspensky line teach Movements only to members of their organizations as an integrated component of the whole teaching they are supplying. The Bennett line experiments with short seminars, open to everybody, where the Movements dominate all other activities. (42)

The Movements, as originally intended, are a complex and sophisticated instrument which encode esoteric principles and knowledge. Many of Gurdjieff's students believe that the Movements constitute a form of objective or sacred art that transmit esoteric knowledge:

Works of art of this quality are not isolated creations. They are part of a whole, of a knowledge concerned entirely with man's development, with his evolution. They speak to us about the realities of a higher level. Although the mind does not understand them, they touch and awaken certain parts of our subconscious. The forms they take constitute a language . . . Neither these works of art nor the Movements were created for their beauty, nor does the main aim of the Movements have to do with the skill required to do them: They were created for the quality of energy they could convey. (43)

Gurdjieff's Movements, along with his music and his writings, form a triad of spiritual influences which were designed to nourish the body, mind and heart of his students. Each has been preserved by Gurdjieff's legitimate successors in the same form in which they were transmitted to them and constitute an enduring legacy to the world.

NOTES

- (1) Gurdjieff used a number of interchangeable terms to describe his movement exercises: "sacred gymnastics," "rhythmic exercise," "sacred dance" and "Movements." The term "Movements" was first used in France in 1922 and is now the most widely accepted of them.
- (2) James Moore *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 351.
- (3) James Moore *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 352.
- (4) Jacob Needleman "Introduction" in Jacob Needleman (ed.) *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008), p. xix.
- (5) Pauline de Dampierre "Sacred Dance: The Search for Conscious Harmony"
www.gurdjieff.org/dampierre1.htm

- (6) C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1962), p. 8.
- (7) Jacob Needleman “Introduction” in Jacob Needleman (ed.) *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008), p. xix.
- (8) Wim Van Dullemen “A Taste of the Sacred: Gurdjieff’s Movements” in David Kherdian (ed.) *A Stopinder Anthology* (Mount Desert, Maine: Beech Hill Publishing, 2014), p. 250.
- (9) During his stay at the Sarmoung monastery in Central Asia, Gurdjieff witnessed a performance of sacred dances. In *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, pp. 162-163) he writes:

Everyone in the monastery knows the alphabet of these postures and when, in the evening in the main hall of the temple, the priestesses perform the dances indicated for the ritual of that day, the brethren may read in these dances one or another truth which men have placed there thousands of years before. These dances correspond precisely to our books. Just as is now done on paper, so, once, certain information about long past events was recorded in dances and transmitted from century to century to people of subsequent generations.

- (10) C.S Nott *Journey Through This World* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1969), p. 240.
- (11) William Patrick Patterson *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2014), pp. 483-484.
- (12) In *Views From the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973, p. 157) Gurdjieff explains how each individual’s physical postures and movements are inextricably linked with his or her thoughts and feelings:

We do not recognize to what an extent the intellectual, emotional and moving functions are mutually dependent, although, at the same time, we can be aware of how much our moods and emotional states depend on our movements and postures. If a man assumes a posture that corresponds, in him, to a feeling of grief or dejection, then within a short time he will actually feel grief or dejection. Fear, indifference, aversion and so on may be created by artificial changes of postures. Since all the functions of man – intellectual, emotional and moving – possess their own definite repertory of postures and are in constant reciprocal action, it follows that a man can never depart from his own repertory.

- (13) G.I. Gurdjieff *Views From the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973), p. 183.

- (14) James Moore *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 352.
- (15) John Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 112.
- (16) For the rhythmic exercises the dancers were dressed in white tunics over full white trousers belted with sashes reflecting the seven colours of the spectrum. In the Oriental dances the students wore colourful costumes designed by Gurdjieff intended to capture the flavour of the East. The dancers stood in lines and at a command by Gurdjieff stretched their arms straight out to their sides and began to beat out complicated rhythms with their feet. This was followed by smaller groups of dancers performing various postures and movements based on intricate designs and patterns. A series of Dervish dances were performed by male dancers, with vigorous rhythms. In sharp contrast, the women's dances which followed had qualities of gentle beauty and grace. Perhaps the most unusual event of the evening was a demonstration of the "Stop" exercise. The dancers lined up at the back of the stage and, when Gurdjieff shouted an order, rushed at full speed towards the audience. Suddenly Gurdjieff shouted "Stop!" and everyone became immobilized, frozen like statues in various postures. Many were carried by the momentum of the rush and fell and rolled over on the floor, becoming rigid as they came to rest. After a minute or so Gurdjieff gave another command and the dancers relaxed and resumed their positions in the original ranks.
- (17) Pauline de Dampierre "The Role of the Movements" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 294.
- (18) Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It's Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2008), p. 462.
- (19) Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It's Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2008), p. 469.
- (20) Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It's Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2008), p. 477.
- (21) Wim Van Dullemen "A Taste of the Sacred: Gurdjieff's Movements" in David Kherdian (ed.) *A Stopinder Anthology* (Mount Desert, Maine: Beech Hill Publishing, 2014), pp. 255-256.
- (22) There are conflicting reports on this matter, with some pupils such as Jessmin and Dushka Howarth indicating that Gurdjieff approved to some degree of "note taking" to safeguard the accurate transmission of the Movements to future generations.

- (23) Gurdjieff and Thomas de Hartmann composed the original music for the Movements. Following Gurdjieff's death, musicians and students of the Work such as Alain Kremski enlarged the repertoire.
- (24) Pauline de Dampierre "Sacred Dance: The Search for Conscious Harmony"
www.gurdjieff.org/dampierre1.htm
- (25) The effect of the Movements on others is vividly described in John Shirley's *Gurdjieff: An Introduction to His Life and Ideas* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2004), pp. 184-185:

Visually, the Gurdjieff Movements are startling. One has a sense of each dancer's sharply defined individuality paradoxically contained in a conscious uniformity of purpose. The Movements rarely involve solo dancers – picture them always as rows of dancers wearing identical white costumes with sashes, moving either identically and simultaneously as a whole, or identically in their own section; sometimes the dancers are divided into rows that move differently with respect to one another but always in an overall symmetry. Other formations beside rows are adopted, at times, with equal precision. The effect of this collective replication of symbolic movement is eerie and enigmatic.

- (26) James Moore *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 352.
- (27) Paul Reynard describes this initial challenge in "Dances are for the Mind"
www.gurdjieff.org/reynard1.htm
- (28) Paul Reynard "Dances are for the Mind" www.gurdjieff.org/reynard1.htm
- (29) Henri Thomasson "Working with the Movements"
www.gurdjieff.org/thomasson1.htm
- (30) Hugh Ripman describes the challenge of trying to master the Movements in Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It's Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2008), p. 106:

From the very beginning, the 'Movements' as they were called made a demand on my attention that was different from anything I had ever experienced – one couldn't hide, one couldn't go to sleep. The moment my attention wandered, I made a mistake. It was in this way that I first tasted in my own experience the force that is generated by attention which is directed by an effort of will for a long time. For myself I could hold my attention steady for a few minutes: but here, where the outside demand was added to my own efforts, and constantly renewed for an hour or an hour and a half, the results were of quite a different order.

- (31) Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Arkana, 1992), p. 139.
- (32) Pauline de Dampierre “The Role of the Movements” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 291.
- (33) Pauline de Dampierre “Sacred Dance: The Search for Conscious Harmony”
www.gurdjieff.org/dampierre1.htm
- (34) Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It’s Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2008), p. 106.
- (35) Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It’s Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2008), p. 465.
- (36) The functioning of the three centres is described in Jessmin and Dushka Howarth, *It’s Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2008), p. 463:

In the Movements, my head knows what the next attitude is supposed to be. It tries to help my body to get there directly. My BODY feels the different positions. It senses how it should be. It knows that it changes the tonicity of its muscles according to the various positions. So it has an attention as well as the head. And in myself I’m eager to do the Movements . . . to learn what they can bring and so there’s also an attention in the FEELING. And when all of these are present, somehow I’m aware of all my energies being used in the right way. I feel myself collected. Somehow, a kind of life force in me is released and I can become more open, more sensitive, and perhaps receive impressions of a finer quality than usual.

- (37) Pauline de Dampierre “The Role of the Movements” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 290.
- (38) This process is described by Henri Thomasson in “Working with the Movements”
www.gurdjieff.org/thomasson1.htm:

A very special level of attention can be reached, and it brings with it a distinct feeling of the two natures of man; the one belonging to the external world and the other to the mysterious source of life itself. All the physical processes that take place in the ordinary life of the body belong to the first nature. Once we recognize the ease with which we slide from most of our efforts of attention into the habitual functioning of our thoughts and accept the whole range of

our everyday joys and sufferings, we have a clear indication of the taste and quality of the lower world. When all thoughts and imagination drop away and only the vibrations of the living body are the centre of attention, the other world becomes accessible. Here all accustomed motives of desire and curiosity become completely unreal and a new kind of thought, liberated from form and composed of a pure but very fragile energy, appears. It is possible to belong to both of these worlds at once, but for this a new relationship between them must be established and the present state of affairs, where the external takes everything for itself, must be reversed. The lower nature should be at the service of the higher.

- (39) A group of students performing the Movements can produce an energy or force which is perceptible to external observers, according to Henri Thomasson (“Working with the Movements” www.gurdjieff.org/thomasson1.htm):

The strange power of the movements to materialize forces of a higher order is not experienced only by those who act as vehicles for these forces. The unfolding of the figures brings into play special inner relationships that are perfectly visible and offer perceptible evidence that the performers are the bearers of forces inherent in the movements themselves and are charged with an influence the effects of which can be felt by onlookers. A movements class which has practised together for a long time radiates a ‘substance,’ the reality of which, subtle though it be, can be received at an inner level in the same way as colour and sound are received by our ordinary instruments of perception.

- (40) Gurdjieff held that ugly and discordant movements were useful in liberating students from obsession with their own appearance. He sometimes required the dancers to make ugly faces or awkward movements for the purpose of self-development.
- (41) Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It's Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2008), p. 470.
- (42) Wim Van Dullemen “A Taste of the Sacred: Gurdjieff’s Movements” in David Kherdian (ed.) *A Stopinder Anthology* (Mount Desert, Maine: Beech Hill Publishing, 2014), pp. 260-262.
- (43) Pauline de Dampierre “The Role of the Movements” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 293.